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Homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 1943

SUBJECT: "MORE SCHOOL LUNCHESES." Information from food distribution officials of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Last year 6 million children in 93 thousand schools throughout the United States had nutritious meals at noon. Children who could afford it paid for their lunches. Those who couldn't were served anyway.

Civic-minded organizations all over the country, such as parent-teacher associations, have taken the responsibility for these lunches, and have had the aid of The U. S. Department of Agriculture. The Government furnished part of the food free of charge. The sponsors saw to cooking and serving the food to the youngsters. In the past Government officials bought up crops of food in abundant supply in different parts of the country, and then shipped this food to the various States for use in school lunches. But, now the heavy wartime demands on food as well as shortages of workers, trucks, tires and gasoline have necessitated some changes in this arrangement for supplying food for school lunches.

The Government will continue to give aid for school lunches but it will ask the sponsors--the parent-teacher groups or others taking charge--to buy the food from local farmers and merchants and then let the Government reimburse them. Exceptions to this new plan are some large cities which still have transportation and warehouses that can take care of carrying and storing food. In these cities the Government will still buy and distribute food for the children's lunches.

But since the war this country has had no surplus foods. The problem now is shortages of food. And many people have asked whether this school lunch program, aided by the Government, should continue.

Here are the arguments in favor of continuing these school lunches--and



increasing them. More and more mothers are taking war jobs and no longer have time to pack nutritious, health-giving lunches for their children to take to school. Lunches served at school will solve this problem. Then, too, rationing food will affect children more than grownups. Children are still growing...must have the right kind of food to build strong bones and teeth and healthy bodies. A good noonday meal is important for the good health of growing children. Reports on school attendance show that schools serving good lunches to the children at noon had more regular attendance--much less absence than schools which did not serve lunches. Thousands of doctors and dentists have gone into the armed forces. War needs have taxed all the country's health facilities. So now each family and each individual must work to prevent illness...to keep in good health. School lunches will help keep the children healthy. But better health is not the only benefit from school lunches. Teachers report better behavior, too...more attention to lessons...better concentration...less restlessness among children who are properly nourished. The food habits of many children improve when they eat together at school. Children learn to like foods they refused at home because their schoolmates like and eat them. In many communities youngsters have reported to their mothers what they have learned about diet, so meals of whole families have improved.

If you haven't yet had a school lunch program in your community, there is no reason why you can't have one. The Government will help you with the cost of the food but it will be up to you and your neighbors to see that the youngsters get it. Your school board, your parent teacher association, or other civic groups must take the responsibility. The job of buying and delivering the food to the school will be up to this sponsoring group. Of course, a great deal of planning is necessary if the lunches are to be nutritious and also delicious. The cooking and serving is a job in itself. In many communities the mothers of the school ;

children take turns cooking and serving the meal. Members of women's clubs in other places are taking over the responsibility.

Here's a story of how one community got a school lunch program for its school. The school lacked everything for cooking and serving food--even space. The men in the community got together enough second-hand lumber to build an addition to the school and also tables and benches. The women collected the necessary cooking utensils. Someone donated a stove. Each family gave foods. And the mothers took turns going to the school and doing the cooking. The school board approved the undertaking and sponsored the program so it was eligible for Government aid. That's how one wise community saw to it that its children had the right food at noon.

Now a word about the schools eligible for Government aid for school lunches. The schools must be non-profit making... must serve lunches free of charge to children unable to pay. The school must not discriminate between children who pay for lunches and those who don't. The organization sponsoring the lunches must enter an agreement with the Food Distribution Administration of the U. S. Department of Agriculture that the conditions of the program will be met. Non-profit-making nursery schools and child-care centers are also eligible.

So if you want a school lunch program in your school, here's how to start the ball rolling. Get your neighbors interested. Take the idea to your school board, parent-teacher group or other civic group. Have them get in touch with the local or State welfare office or write direct to the Food Distribution Administration of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

